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NEWS

So You Want to Play Pickleball

JOYCE WESTNER | STAFF WRITER

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by Joyce Westner

July 31, 2023. Many sports-minded residents have embraced the new game of pickleball, and there are many places to play, from courts, private clubs, to the Jenks Center whose members can take lessons

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from a local "Pickleball Ambassador." And she's hoping the town will develop more courts at Ginn Field—they already allow the game at Leonard's Field.

As the ambassador for Boston North, Marjorie Berger (pictured above) got that designation from the USA Pickleball Association, the de facto governing body of the sport, and she enthusiastically described the programs through the recreation department and at the Jenks. She'd been playing for fourteen years when in 2010 she asked the recreation department to start a program. "At first," she said, "we set up a group at the Mystic School Auditorium, but it was too short. So we moved it to the McCall gym on Tuesday nights. But during the high school renovation they took over the gym and I took groups to Malden to play indoors during the winter months. I also talked to the Winchester Indoor Tennis Club."

It took a while before that club decided to try, said Berger, but they've been offering court space since last fall. Most players sign up on a website called Playtimescheduler.com, although the Jenks does its own signups. Players can request court time for a foursome, or they can sign up individually and be matched with players at a similar level (determined through various rating systems). She explained the matchings, and at the Jenks they often do open play instead of by ratings. "There's value to that—people learn from playing with lesser players," she said.

To keep it safe, she teaches the Jenks players to do it carefully. "Never cross your legs, I tell them, and never back up for a ball."

Which is in sharp contrast to how Grove Place resident Andy Skinner operates. "I'm completely in love with the game," he said. He started at the Jenks when he was barely old enough (Jenks members are 55 and up) and graduated to other venues. Having played tennis and racquetball and with what he calls a low center of gravity, Skinner is rated as a 3.[illegible] player (out of 5). He believes in dinking, which is a way to hit the ball into

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the opponent's non-volley zone. He loves the Jenks games because they believe in patience and tolerance. "Let's just have fun," he says is the Jenks attitude.

Kim Miles, a Tufts Road resident and financial advisor, played it safe during the first COVID years and started playing with twelve friends at the Winchester Country Club. "It saved us," she said. "We were able to get outside and socialize. And two of us went to the courts behind the Woburn Public Library," she added—another place available through the Playtimescheduler app.

"Lead pickleball" Churchill Circle resident Lisa Ouellette organizes games at Life Time, a private club in Burlington. There 600 players a month go at the game from 4 a.m. until after midnight. All those interviewed about pickleball emphasized the way to avoid injuries. Skinner says it's important to let the body recover after each game, not to overdo it. Ouellette says it's vital to warm up, and despite its reputation as a game anyone can play, "It's a sport," and easier to play for those who played other court sports like tennis. They do allow children over 12 to play but there's only a handful who play well with the adults, she says.

"There are lots of older people playing it," she says. "It's very community-oriented, very social."

To come play with others at Leonard's Field, Berger says folks should register through the Playtimescheduler app. By choosing Greater Boston as their geographical location, a list of days and times will come up where pickleballers can sign up by town. "These sessions are for people who already know how to play," she says, "there are no lessons."

Berger just planned a beginner's session at the Jenks Center for Sept. 15 and 22 for four beginners. And two-part clinics for four people.

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Occasionally someone signs up for lessons but they're not a good match for the game, says Berger. A cane user gave it a try, and she didn't try to stop them. But they decided it wasn't for them, although there are wheelchair users who play, and there was a recent wheelchair tournament in Andover.

"It's community," Skinner says.

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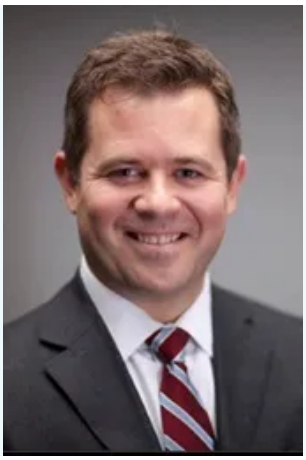

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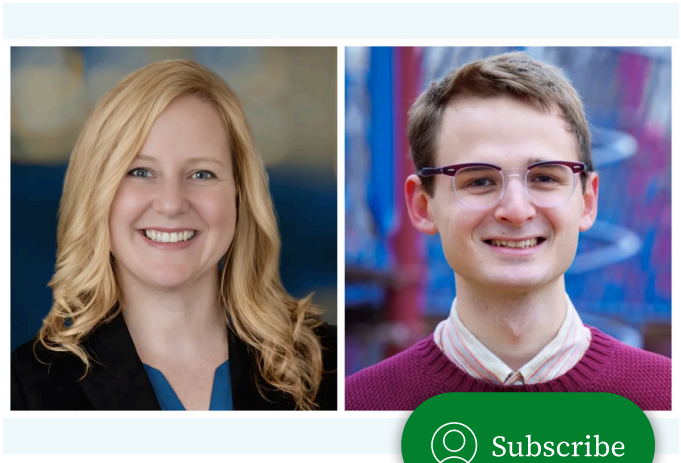

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Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents 'Syldason: You Are Welcome Here'

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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